



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

Seattle City Light

Jorge Carrasco, Superintendent

Frequently Asked Questions

Goat Vegetation Management

Q – Why does the property need to be cleared?

A - The slope on the north side of the North Seattle Substation (between N.E. 75th and N.E. 78th Streets) is overgrown with blackberry and English ivy and has been for many years. Weeds and other plants in a substation can be a safety problem causing electrical shorts. These plants are not in the part of the substation that would be considered dangerous, but do become a source of seeds that fall into the danger area. Also, the weeds are a nuisance for adjacent residents. The slope is a hard area for normal hand clearing because the underbrush is so thick and the location of the vegetation isn't easily accessible for machines. The alternative would be chemical herbicides, which isn't acceptable. Chemical use would be a problem for adjoining private property.

Q – Why were goats selected to clear the property?

A – After carefully researching the issue and assessing our options, it was agreed that a herd of 250 goats would be the best option available to City Light to clear the underbrush and to eat the foliage. The clearing will be done over a three-day period sometime in the fall. The goats will come back again in the spring to eat any new growth. Goats are browsers. They eat leaves from the branches of bushes and other plants as opposed to grazing livestock, which eat mostly grasses. Goats are an ideal answer to the topography that exists at the substation too. Using goats is a good way to get at blackberries and other noxious weeds like ivy and Scotch broom. Goats go into a dense overgrown area and literally eat their way through the thicket.

Q - Have goats been used for this type of vegetation management anywhere else?

A - Yes. Last year Seattle Parks used goats to clear a piece of Seattle City Light property that was being turned into a park. The York Park project at 3650 Renton Avenue South used goats successfully. Cities including Los Angeles and Oakland use herds of goats to clear brush to prevent wild fires. The Orachita National Forest in Arkansas has had a 3-year program using goats and herds have been used successfully in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina.

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Tel: (206) 684-3000, TDD: (206) 684-3225, FAX: (206) 684-3709; <http://seattle.gov/light>

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Q - What other methods could City Light use?

A - Alternatives that have been ruled out are herbicides, mechanical and hand clearing. Not only do these methods have environmental consequences, they can make the soil unstable and cause erosion. In addition, plant refuse would have to be hauled away, whereas goats naturally recycle plant material. Any remaining plant materials left after the goats are finished will be cleared and composted.

Q – What will be done on the property once it is cleared?

A – A plan has not been formalized yet. We need to see what is under all that growth and see what changes can be made to the slope to make future maintenance easier. It's a tough area to replant since there will always be weeds, blackberries ivy and other nuisance plants trying to flourish there. Building is not an option. The slope is a result of grading a portion of the area for the substation flat and leaving the remaining slope as natural topography.

Q - Will there be a smell from the goats?

A – Usually strong smell associated with goats is due to adult male goats being present. This herd will be all female goats and their kids. If there is any odor present, it will be from the smell of urine. However, this odor dissipates (evaporates) quickly and neighbors won't notice it after the goats are gone.

Q - Will the goats be noisy?

A - There could be a small amount of noise during the day. The herd has both female adults and kids. Mothers and offspring sometimes call out to one another during browsing hours. At night the kids have found their mothers and will be sleeping.

Q - How will the goats be kept from wandering onto private property?

A - The goats will be inside a fenced enclosure while they are grazing and at night when they are resting.

Q - Are the goats in any danger?

A - The goat shepherd has a special fence to keep the goats from wandering into the electrical facilities. A tall fence surrounds the substation property itself and will keep the animals confined.

Q – Is there any place I can go to get more information on goats used in vegetation management?

A- City Light's web page at www.seattle.gov/light has a page with information on this plan and links to other organizations which have used goats for vegetation management.

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